

April 18, 2007

Ms. Leanne Blood
Employee Relations Specialist
Washington Public Employees Association
North 4407 Division Street Suite 514
Spokane, WA 99207

RE: JoAnn Johnson v. Columbia Basin College
Allocation Review Request HEU No. 4635

Dear Ms. Blood:

On November 28, 2006, I conducted a Director's review meeting by telephone conference call regarding the allocation of JoAnn Johnson's position. Both you and Ms. Johnson participated in the conference. Camilla Glatt, Vice President for Human Resources & Legal Affairs, represented Columbia Basin College (CBC). Teri Cox, Director of HR Operations, and Donna Campbell, Director of the Career Development Division, were also present during the conference call.

Background

On February 24, 2006, Ms. Johnson submitted a Position Review Request (PRR) to the Human Resources (HR) Office, requesting that her Office Assistant (OA) 2 position be reallocated to an Office Assistant 3. In a memorandum dated April 25, 2006, Ms. Glatt informed Ms. Johnson her position was properly allocated to the OA 2 classification because she determined the duties assigned to Ms. Johnson's position were routine in nature.

Summary of Ms. Johnson's Perspective

Ms. Johnson contends she performs complex clerical duties in support of the WorkFirst program. As an example, Ms. Johnson states she prepares and monitors budget information regarding students who receive funding through the WorkFirst Program. Ms. Johnson also asserts she compiles and tracks the financial information on spreadsheets she was asked to create and maintain. While Ms. Johnson acknowledges the amount of

tuition awarded comes from the Financial Aid Department, she asserts that she initiates the process by having students complete a WorkFirst form. She then enters dollar amounts based on the selection of courses, which can fluctuate if courses are added or dropped. Ms. Johnson further asserts she tracks tuition and books on another spreadsheet and enters the total amount that WorkFirst will incur on the form and enters the information in the database. Ms. Johnson states she tracks the information and forwards the original form to Financial Aid to enter the actual tuition award.

Additionally, Ms. Johnson contends she is the primary point of contact for students and clients seeking WorkFirst services, and as a result, she asserts she screens individuals for eligibility prior to scheduling appointments with the training specialist. Ms. Johnson further asserts she resolves problems by asking the clients questions and referring them to other campus services when they are not eligible for services offered in the program. Ms. Johnson contends she needs to be knowledgeable about the rules, policies, and procedures and familiar with other services to best assist the clients she serves. Similarly, Ms. Johnson states she understands the program well, which she asserts is necessary when taking meeting minutes that can sometimes involve complex issues. Overall, Ms. Johnson believes her duties are more complex than routine, and she asserts she should be reallocated to the OA 3 classification.

Summary of Columbia Basin College's (CBC's) Reasoning

CBC contends the duties Ms. Johnson performs are routine rather than complex. While CBC acknowledges Ms. Johnson creates spreadsheets in Excel to track monetary information, CBC asserts she transfers existing data from documents like the WorkFirst form or from the database to a spreadsheet. As a result, CBC contends Ms. Johnson's assigned duties are very process oriented and asserts she does not independently compile financial data. CBC further asserts that Ms. Johnson's supervisor reviews the spreadsheets she maintains. CBC states that Ms. Johnson's position has not been assigned the task of making critical determinations; rather, CBC contends she transfers and inputs data and performs her duties within the confines of that process.

With regard to the initial screening of prospective students using WorkFirst services, CBC contends Ms. Johnson's role is limited to informing students and clients about three specific criteria, which include 1) income level; 2) work status; and 3) parental status. CBC characterizes Ms. Johnson's involvement as providing information and guidelines, which the prospective students can use to self-assess their eligibility. Although Ms. Johnson may suggest other options and campus services available, CBC contends she has not been assigned the role of a counselor and states she does not have the authority to deny a request for services. Instead, CBC asserts the training specialists have the discretion to make determinations regarding eligibility. In addition, CBC does not consider referrals to other programs to be consistent with the level of problem resolution at the OA 3 level. CBC notes that a position's allocation is not based on the quality of Ms. Johnson's work; rather, it is based on the duties assigned to her position, and CBC contends the college's need for her position is to perform OA 2 work. Therefore, CBC asserts Ms. Johnson's position is properly allocated to the OA 2 classification.

Director's Determination

This position review was based on the work performed for at least the six-month period prior to February 24, 2006, the date Ms. Johnson submitted her Position Review Request.

As the Director's designee, I carefully considered all of the documentation in the file, the exhibits presented during the Director's review meeting, and the verbal comments provided by both parties. Based on my review and analysis of Ms. Johnson's assigned duties and responsibilities, I conclude her position is properly allocated to the Office Assistant 2 classification.

Rationale for Determination

The Job Description for Ms. Johnson's position (Exhibit R), approved on June 30, 2005, summarizes the position as follows:

Under the supervision of the WorkFirst Program coordinator, this position performs various office support tasks for the WorkFirst Program staff and the WorkFirst coordinator. Responsibilities include answering telephone and in person inquiries regarding program services and eligibility.

The category concept for the Clerical, Office Support and Secretarial Occupational Category notes that positions provide a variety of clerical services in support of a work unit, department, supervisor(s), staff members, and/or general day-to-day office operations.

The distinguishing characteristics of an OA 2 include the following:

Perform a variety of routine clerical duties such as processing documents and records, extracting and compiling records or data, responding to routine inquiries concerning office/departmental services and procedures, maintaining and monitoring established record keeping, filing and data base systems.

Duties and assignments are of a routine nature. Routine duties are recurring and accomplished by following established work methods or procedures. Within established guidelines, independently organizes, prioritizes, and initiates work activities. Decision making authority is limited to choice of appropriate methods or procedures.

The distinguishing characteristics of an OA 3 differ because incumbents "independently perform a variety of complex clerical projects and assignments such as preparing reports, preparing, reviewing, verifying and processing fiscal documents and/or financial records . . ." Incumbents also compose correspondence and respond to inquiries requiring substantive knowledge of office/departmental policies and procedures. Further,

assignments are complex in nature and require independent performance. Problems are resolved by choosing from established procedures and/or devising work methods.

In reviewing the Position Review Request (PRR) (Exhibit 2), Ms. Johnson's supervisor, WorkFirst Coordinator Sally Meador, did not agree with Ms. Johnson's depiction of her duties and crossed out her signature. During the Director's review meeting, Ms. Glatt confirmed that Ms. Meador disagreed with Ms. Johnson's statements. This is further confirmed in Ms. Glatt's allocation determination by the description of responses by Ms. Johnson, Ms. Meador, and Ms. Campbell while discussing the PRR during the college's review process (Exhibit 1).

When reviewing the PRR in conjunction with the job description, many of the essential functions, duties, and responsibilities listed in the job description provide an explanation for the assigned work that Ms. Johnson describes in the PRR. The following is a comparison of duties identified by Ms. Johnson in the PRR and those stated in the job description, which were further clarified during the interviews with Ms. Johnson's supervisor and division director at the college level, as well as the Director's review conference:

- PRR 20% - Serve as the primary point of contact for students, staff, and the general public in person and by telephone. Provide information regarding program content, policies, and procedures. Administer pre-screening paperwork to prospective students, and identify education levels through proctored tests.

Job Description: Answer telephones, receive and refer visitors including staff and the public; respond to program inquiries including eligibility criteria. Maintain Training Specialist's calendar . . . and make intake appointments.

During the meeting with Ms. Glatt, Ms. Johnson explained that at times she is the only person in the office and that she talks with and listens to students with special needs. She also said that she helps students with questions or problems, based on her experience with the college, and refers them to other services, such as Financial Aid (Exhibit 1, page 4). Similarly, during the Director's review meeting, Ms. Johnson stated that she assists students by providing available options and considers her interactions to be methods for solving problems.

While Ms. Glatt acknowledged Ms. Johnson is empathetic and provides encouragement to students with special circumstances, this is not the level of problem-solving required of an OA 3. Rather, this is consistent with the OA 2 distinguishing characteristic of responding to routine inquiries concerning office/departamental services and procedures. Further, although Ms. Johnson may be able to suggest other campus services, she is essentially providing information and has not been assigned the level of responsibility that entails complex problem-solving or decision-making, and her supervisor has the final authority to resolve complex issues (Exhibit 1, page 4).

With regard to pre-screening paperwork, Ms. Johnson discussed administering a CASAS Test when she met with Ms. Glatt (Exhibit 1, page 5). In the discussion, she talked about scoring the test with an answer sheet she created. Ms. Campbell, however, clarified that Ms. Johnson uses a key to score the test and transcribes the scores into education levels provided by the testing company. The level of work performed is consistent with the OA 2 level of processing and transferring data, which is different than independently placing students at a certain level. With regard to screening clients for eligibility, Ms. Johnson may provide a student with the basic criteria and program guidelines, but she does not have the authority to make decisions about a student's eligibility for services.

- PRR 10% - Resolves problems and responds to inquiries regarding WorkFirst program procedures and services; and rules, regulations, policies of Columbia Basin College.

Job Description: Problem Solving Skills – Identifies and resolves problems in a timely manner; Gathers and analyzes information skillfully; Develops alternative solutions; . . . Uses reason even when dealing with emotional topics.

At the OA 2 level, problem solving is limited to the position's area of responsibility. Similarly, "decision making authority is limited to choice of appropriate methods or procedures." Additionally, "[d]eviation from established methods, procedures, or guidelines requires approval." Again, Ms. Johnson's supervisor, Ms. Meador, has indicated that Ms. Johnson does not engage in problem solving with regard to WorkFirst inquiries. Rather, Ms. Johnson explains the program and procedures (Exhibit 1, page 4), which is consistent with providing information or responding to inquiries.

- PRR 20% - Utilize database software to track students and prospective students. Establish and maintain student tracking systems, download and print database reports and rosters while maintaining program database. Cross checks and tabulates standard information; checks incoming forms and documents for required information; extracts and compiles statistical data from source documents.

Job Description: Enter, retrieve, and maintain data from electronic files . . .; Crosschecks and tabulates standard information; checks incoming forms and documents for required information; extracts and compiles statistical data from source documents.

- PRR 20% - Perform word processing and typing tasks to produce labels, letters, reports, meeting minutes, notes, emails, tables, and memos. Take monthly meeting minutes. Make copies, file and update files and archive each year. Sort and distribute mail, messages, records, office supplies.

Job Description: Performs basic word processing or typing tasks and printing by using Microsoft Office XP Professional to produce meeting notes, reports,

letters or memos; and to maintain database and spreadsheets. Operate office equipment, including copy machine; receives, sorts and distributes mail, messages, records, office supplies, and photocopies other materials.

The two sections above (each identified as 20%) primarily relate to checking and processing information using Microsoft Office to perform data entry, create and maintain spreadsheets, and perform word processing. Part of the process includes checking forms, reports, and the database, to ensure existing information is accurate, based on established procedures. These duties are routine and recurring and consistent with the OA 2 distinguishing characteristics of processing documents, extracting and compiling records or data, maintaining and monitoring established record keeping, filing and data base systems, and producing forms, letters, and record entries.

- PRR 30% - Prepare and monitor budget records for the WorkFirst program using a database in Access. Excel spreadsheets and Word tables that [Ms. Johnson] created from scratch. Work closely with CBC's Financial Aid Department where [Ms. Johnson] reviews and verifies the tuition awards for students granted funding through the WorkFirst program; the CBC Bookstore where [Ms. Johnson] reviews and verifies the money in that account to make sure there is enough . . . review and verify payment of basic education fees.

Job Description: Cross checks and tabulates standard information; checks incoming forms and documents for required information; extracts and compiles statistical data from source documents; Use Microsoft Office to maintain spreadsheets; Performs tasks which require the use of basic arithmetic such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

During the meeting with Ms. Glatt and the Director's review meeting, Ms. Johnson described the above section (identified as 30% on the PRR) as complex clerical duties. She explained that she created spreadsheets to track and monitor budget information relating to WorkFirst. However, after reviewing the job description and considering the comments made by Ms. Johnson and Ms. Glatt, I conclude the above duties are consistent with an OA 2 position. Ms. Johnson's duties are limited to extracting and compiling existing data from source documents and transferring that information to spreadsheets for tracking purposes.

Although Ms. Johnson may use some basic arithmetic when tracking money awarded for tuition and books or when classes are added or dropped, she does not make decisions about WorkFirst funding or perform a level of fiscal review beyond comparing figures in a spreadsheet to those on source documents/reports or information in the database. The level of verification is limited to cross checking and tabulating standard information. In addition, Ms. Johnson's supervisor reviews the spreadsheets for accuracy. This does not meet the level of reviewing, verifying, and processing fiscal documents or reports representative of the OA 3 classification. At the OA 3 level, incumbents independently review and verify information for compliance and investigate and correct errors. Ms.

Johnson, however, transfers existing dollar amounts from various documents to spreadsheets.

While Ms. Johnson clearly takes the initiative to assist students and provide useful information and has sustained a working knowledge of the WorkFirst Program, a position review is limited to the duties and responsibilities assigned to the incumbent's position and how the majority of those duties best fit into the available job classifications. Therefore, the Office Assistant 2 classification best describes Ms. Johnson's position.

Appeal Rights

WAC 357-49-018 provides that either party may appeal the results of the Director's review to the Personnel Resources Board (board) by filing written exceptions to the Director's determination in accordance with Chapter 357-52 WAC.

WAC 357-52-015 states that an appeal must be received in writing at the office of the board within thirty (30) calendar days after service of the Director's determination. The address for the Personnel Resources Board is 2828 Capitol Blvd., P.O. Box 40911, Olympia, Washington, 98504-0911.

If no further action is taken, the Director's determination becomes final.

Sincerely,

Teresa Parsons
Director's Review Supervisor
Legal Affairs Division

c: JoAnn Johnson,
Camilla Glatt, CBC
Lisa Skriletz, DOP

Enclosure: List of Exhibits